

**Speech by IDRC President Maureen O'Neil at the Asian Development Bank
November 15, 1999**

President Mr Tadao Chino, Vice Presidents- Mr Myoung-Ho Shin, Mr Peter Sullivan and Mr John Lintjer - Officers of the Asian Development Bank...

After many years of learning about the Bank, and following its development and its activities, it is a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak with colleagues in the ADB, and to address you as a group. In the world of institutions engaged in international development, the ADB is a giant - along with the World Bank and other regional development banks. And although you started primarily as a lender for major projects, the evolution of the Bank toward a broad-based development institution is important to the Asia region. Especially significant is the balancing lending and non-lending services in the areas of policy advice, support of good governance systems and practices, assistance in country capacity building, and mobilizing additional private sector resources.

By contrast with the ADB, the International Development Research Centre, IDRC, is a small organization. We have a staff of 450, world wide, and an annual budget of 120 million Canadian dollars. And while we are broad-based in our ideas and thinking, we are very specialized in development research and development policy.

In spite of these differences, we have a lot in common. And there are many areas where our objectives and activities complement yours, and where your objectives and activities supplement ours. It is these areas I would like to highlight in my remarks today. And it is interesting in this context that we have collaborated in many areas including, for example, several components of your Mekong Sub-regional Economic Cooperation Program. But our collaboration has extended to joint funding of projects only six times since the late 1980s, when we first began supporting projects together.

Our similarities are perhaps most striking on both our strategic and our operating objectives. As with the Bank, our overarching goal is poverty reduction. Protection of the environment, and improvement of the status of women are common strategic objectives. Environmental protection and sustainable natural resource management have become increasingly more important due to economic growth and resource degradation, population pressures, and the Asia financial crisis. Improvement of the status of women is an issue both of fundamental social equity and of economic development.

We both pursue our strategic aims through policy support, capacity building, and regional cooperation - though our capacity building and regional cooperation efforts are focused on development research and policy. We both see governance as a key factor in prospects for development in many parts of Asia, and we see it as very important that the ADB has been the first regional development bank to adopt a governance policy.

So I would characterize our common ground, at this level, as poverty reduction, environmental

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protection, gender equity, governance, capacity building, and regional cooperation.

Yet our size and focus are so different that it is an interesting question where our interests and agendas may meet. On this subject, I believe that there are substantial benefits for both of our organizations in intellectual cooperation and sharing of experiences. This has been our experience with the African Development in recent years, and I believe there are many contributing reasons.

IDRC is essentially an intellectual organization. By this, I do not mean to say that we are intellectually vain or arrogant. We are oriented to the use of knowledge to solve practical development problems - highly applied research. We have a professional staff which is highly trained in social and natural sciences, and aim for the use of this knowledge for poorest countries - directly and for capacity building in research and policy development.

The ADB, in the course of its activities, supports a great deal of development research and capacity building in Asia. Often we work with the same organizations and people. On balance, however, the ADB tends to work with Governments, and to have the ear of its member governments. IDRC works often with government agencies, but very frequently connects them in research and policy analysis with academic, research and non-governmental organizations. Sharing our differing experiences and perspectives, in terms of our principal clients, has the potential to be very valuable to us both.

The ADB Institute was created in many respects to provide a focus for the ADB's research and capacity-building efforts. And we have followed its initial development and spoken with the ADBI President and staff in Tokyo. The ADBI's current agenda concentrates on issues fundamental to Asian development - new development paradigms, strengthening financial and exchange rate systems, Asian competitiveness, and new education strategies. We focus on two of these - financial systems and competitiveness - but concentrate even more on different ones - notably environmental protection and natural resource management, and the use of information and communications technologies for development.

I see our intellectual cooperation and sharing of experiences in part with respect to the ADBI and the areas where we overlap. But I also see a particular window of opportunity in terms of the Bank itself and the areas where we can extend the reach of the ADBI.

In both cases, we have long and close contacts with networks of research and policy institutions and individuals in Asia. Like you, at a time when our value-added - and indeed our credibility in the global architecture of development institutions - depends greatly on our ability to work on the ground with partners in Asia, we see value in sharing ideas and experiences and networks with other institutions with strong roots in this region.

I would like to say a little more about IDRC in this context. Unlike the ADB, we operate in each of the developing regions of the world. But like you, our work in each region stems from the needs of - and relationships with - regional, national and local partners. We nevertheless

assimilate the experiences from different regions on a daily basis, and not infrequently connect partners from different regions in projects we support.

In the past, more often than not, requests have come from Africa and Latin America to connect with, and learn from, organizations in Asia. In recent years, the perception has expanded that all regions have much to learn from others. This is not a result of the Asia Crisis, or the perception that many countries in Asia are less interesting than before as development models. It is much more a result of increased cross-regional knowledge, and consequently, of its value. Canadians as well as Africans perceive increasingly how much they have to gain from sharing knowledge and experience with Asians and Latin Americans. This is one area where I believe the ADB and IDRC could benefit from enhanced cooperation.

I have mentioned Canadians, and it may be worth emphasizing that IDRC is in fundamental ways a Canadian organization. But it is an unusual one, even for Canada. Half of our Board of Governors is from Canada, and the other half from developing countries. Our staff members come from virtually all countries of the World. We behave in many ways like an international organization. Again, I see some synergy with the ADB in these characteristics. You have close contact with Asia, and through your non-Asian members, with Europe and North America in particular. We are based in Canada, but have seven regional offices in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. Bringing global knowledge to others, and Asian knowledge to others, is very high in our priorities - and those of our developing country partners. Connecting Asian development debate and experience with that in America and Europe is, I believe, essential to the mission of the ADB.

In the past, we have focused on many common areas. Agriculture was our bread and butter during the 70s and much of the 80s. Education and health were major focal points in social policy and social services. From the beginning, we have had an information sciences program, and today we give more emphasis than at any previous time to the use of information and communication technologies for development - from Internet use by research and education institutions, to networking, learning and economic applications at the community level. I see the Bank developing a strong vision of the role of information and knowledge in development, and believe we have much to gain in sharing our ideas and experiences in this rapidly changing and expanding field.

In summary, I believe that we have some broad similarities and some specific differences. And I believe it is this precise combination which generates potential benefits from closer collaboration. We would like to explore and capitalize on these. At this stage, I do not know the exact form that closer collaboration may take. I have ideas from other contexts, such as our interaction with the African Development Bank. But Asia is different, and the ADB is unique. I feel strongly that some initial steps to share knowledge and experience and networks would benefit both organizations, and that if there are other useful steps to take, they will emerge from this sharing.

And when I say ADB and IDRC, I include most importantly our Asian and Southern partners. It is my hope and expectation that we and our partners might offer you and your partners means to



learn and experiment and act in ways that would not otherwise be possible or easy. And I have no doubt at all that the 'vice versa' is both true, and important to the growth of development research in Asia.